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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HANOI 000338

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [UNSC](#) [VM](#)  
SUBJECT: VIETNAM ON THE UNSC: CONSULTATION PAYS OFF  
  
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Classified By: Ambassador Michael W. Michalak.  
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: While Vietnam does not have an immediate stake in the majority of Security Council matters, the GVN takes its engagement with the world community, and particularly its membership on the Security Council, seriously. Although lacking experience in such fora, the GVN wants and expects to participate as a full partner and values being treated as such. It approaches UNSC issues based on its interpretation of international law and its principles of foreign policy, influenced by its own internal and geopolitical concerns. At the same time, as the February vote on the Iran resolution showed, the GVN can be persuaded to take a constructive position, even when such action results in letting down a "friend." In that instance, high-level engagement treating the GVN as a full UNSC partner may have made the difference. There has not been a UNSC issue where the GVN was asked to choose between the United States and China. While any such GVN choice will be influenced by many factors, the character of U.S. engagement with GVN officials on key issues will be important to achieving a positive outcome. End Summary.

#### Impact of GVN,s Consensus-Based Decision-Making

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¶2. (C) Some traits specific to the GVN's internal governance and foreign policy agenda will have an impact on its UNSC decisions. Concerning governance, decision-making in the GVN is consensus-based and finding agreement among parties before taking action is a fundamental aspect of Vietnamese political culture. Views in the GVN and the Communist Party of Vietnam ("CPV") are not monolithic, and decisions are reached collectively among vying factions that represent different power centers and policy visions. This mechanism is not transparent. While the vast majority of UNSC actions will not call for highest-level GVN consideration, decisions that could have fallout on Vietnam's key bilateral relationships, particularly the United States and China, will likely be internally contentious matters. VFM Pham Binh Minh has acknowledged as much, telling the Ambassador that Vietnam's biggest challenge will be "direct pressure from major countries" and other countries involved in votes regarding regional security issues.

¶3. (C) In a recent press briefing, MFA International Organizations Department Director Le Hoai Trung summarized the GVN's key UNSC policies as "independence, sovereignty, openness, diversification and multi-lateralization," echoing Vietnam's overall foreign policy agenda. In discussions about UNSC matters, MFA interlocutors consistently stress certain "principles" that provide the starting point for consideration of any issue. These principles include:

- Compliance with international law;
- Respect and support for working within the UN system, including a reluctance to stake out independent positions prior to the input of the Secretary General;
- Non-interference in the internal affairs other countries;
- Reliance on dialogue to solve differences, whether internal or between states. This view reflects the GVN's internal consensus decision-making process and is consistent with its approach to ASEAN, ARF and other multilateral bodies.
- A reflexive rejection of sanctions as a tool for motivating recalcitrant regimes. This position was re-affirmed by President Nguyen Minh Triet in the UNSC context on November 27 when he rejected the use of sanctions against Burma in remarks made during a visit to Japan. Triet cited Vietnam's experience as the target of sanctions and the "agony" felt by the Vietnamese people at the time. From that experience, the GVN has drawn the lesson that, when sanctions are imposed, they result in suffering for the general public.

#### GVN Officials Want To Be Consulted

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14. (C) As a practical matter, post has heard from GVN sources that the GVN wants to be consulted at the early stages of consideration of an issue. GVN officials look unfavorably on proposals that have been pre-negotiated by the P-5 and then presented to the remaining UNSC members. In the case of the recent Iran resolution, MFA officials have told post that high-level contacts in the run-up to the vote, particularly calls by the Secretary and EAP Assistant Secretary Christopher Hill to their respective counterparts, were viewed very positively on the Vietnamese side. DPM/FM Pham Gia Khiem was out sick and came into the office on a Saturday night to take the call from the Secretary. According to an MFA official who was with Khiem when he took the call, Khiem deeply appreciated the opportunity to consult with his U.S. counterpart.

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#### Decision-making: The Buck Stops...Where?

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15. (C) MFA sources have provided some insight into the GVN's decision-making process on UNSC matters, both within the GVN and between Hanoi and New York. Nonetheless, just as the general process of GVN decision-making is opaque to the outsider, the decision-making process on difficult UNSC issues is not obvious. It appears that only a small number of issues need to be addressed at the highest level, the Politburo. Most likely those would be issues that divide the P-5, particularly the United States and China, in cases where a decision one way or the other could have repercussions for Vietnam's bilateral relations. But generally Vietnam's UN Permanent Representative Le Luong Minh, as he mentioned in a recent interview, has the authority to vote on issues "within his capacity" at UNSC sessions, except for "new and complicated issues" where he must consult with Hanoi. An MFA source clarified that, due to the sensitivity of Middle East issues, Vietnam's UN Mission must report all such issues to MFA leadership for its consideration, after which the leadership will decide whether to make the decision in Hanoi or to delegate this authority to its mission in New York.

16. (C) MFA sources have said that decisions on issues involving Africa are largely made in New York. At the MFA, issues involving Africa are shared between three specialists, each having responsibility for certain countries. These interlocutors have always been well-informed about the issues when first raised; however at later meetings they lacked information about subsequent actions and outcomes at the UNSC.

17. (C) While the GVN recognizes that crises require quick decisions on UNSC matters, it is not clear what mechanism the GVN has in place for quick turn-around on any such decision that would need to be made at the highest level. Likewise,

the mechanism for interagency coordination on UNSC matters is not clear. MFA officials have been consistently available to meet for discussion of UNSC matters on short notice and after-hours, however, and it does appear the contents of our demarches are communicated in turn to the other appropriate offices within the MFA.

#### The Toughest Issues: Burma, Kosovo, Iran

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¶18. (C) Burma: While Vietnam supported China's position on Burma, this outcome reflected Hanoi's own position on the issue, apart from any consideration of its bilateral relationship with China. The GVN position on Burma was consistent since the crackdown began in August 2007 -- non-interference in Burma's internal affairs, need for inclusive dialogue within Burma, support for a UN role. While DPM/FM Khiem joined with his ASEAN counterparts to call for the release of political prisoners and an inclusive dialogue in Burma, the GVN has shown no inclination to bring greater pressure to bear on Burmese authorities. From the GVN perspective, interference in Burma's affairs would set an unwelcome precedent in the event the GVN should need to deal harshly with political unrest at home. As an additional factor, an MFA official said that as an Asian member state, the GVN should defend the interests of other Asian countries at the UN.

¶19. (C) Kosovo: In the case of Kosovo, repeated demarches yielded no change in the GVN's position. This was not a case of a knee-jerk reaction by Vietnam; indeed VFM Minh responded to our demarches with a detailed and well-reasoned discussion of the specific issues at stake in Kosovo and Serbia as well as the larger implications for the region and the world. The issue was "very far, but very near" for Vietnam, Minh said. Hanoi is not keen to encourage separatist movements by ethnic groups within Vietnam. Other MFA officials similarly referred to principles of respect for sovereignty and international law, and indicated a preference to allow more time in order for a mutually agreed solution to be reached.

#### The Iran Resolution: Choosing Between Friends

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¶10. (C) More than any other issue that has arisen since Vietnam took its seat on the UNSC, the resolution on Iran presented a test of Vietnam's ability to act constructively when forced to "choose between its friends." As Vietnam's UNSC membership approached, it was clear that Vietnam's "friend with all countries" approach to foreign policy would be challenged when it took its UNSC seat. While GVN political and economic ties with Iran are not particularly close, MFA officials have consistently described their bilateral relations positively and look forward to further

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development. Although the GVN opposes all nuclear proliferation, it supports Iran's right to have a civilian nuclear program. As mentioned above, high-level contacts on this issue were welcomed by the MFA, which also took apparent pride in noting that it was the sole non-permanent member to offer changes to the draft resolution.

¶11. (C) An MFA source mentioned that the Iranian ambassador in Hanoi had lobbied hard against the resolution at MFA's West Asia and Africa and International Organizations Departments. The Iranian ambassador was subsequently "shocked" at Vietnam's vote in support of the resolution. This source explained that in dealing with the ambassador, MFA officials had "expressed sympathy" for Iran's situation. Despite the "shock," the vote reportedly has not had a negative impact on Vietnam-Iran relations.

#### UN Mission More Forward Leaning than Hanoi

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¶12. (C) In statements involving PKO and Afghan reconstruction, Vietnam's PermRep Minh has stated forward leaning positions on the readiness of the GVN that were subsequently rolled back in Hanoi. In November 2007 in New York, Minh announced Vietnam's "readiness" to participate in PKO. Interlocutors at MFA and Ministry of Defense in Hanoi clarified, however, that despite their separate two-year studies and interagency working group, the GVN was not ready to contribute forces to PKOs. Eventual PKO participation remains contingent on passage of authorizing legislation and preparation of public opinion. On March 12, Minh expressed Vietnam's "readiness to take part in Afghanistan's reconstruction efforts bilaterally and in tripartite frameworks." Post follow-up with the MFA revealed that the GVN had no particular action in mind other than to invite an Afghan delegation to Vietnam in order to share views on post-war reconstruction and to sell humanitarian relief supplies to donors.

Getting to "Yes" with the Vietnamese  
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¶13. (C) During its brief tenure on the Security Council so far, Vietnam has made clear that it takes its responsibility seriously and that it wants to be recognized as a full partner in the Council's business. While recognizing the preponderant role of the P-5, the GVN will welcome early consultation on matters before the Security Council as an avenue to establish an inclusive and consensus-based working relationship where common ground can be reached. To the extent the United States is able to establish mutual confidence in its working relations with the GVN early in Vietnam's tenure, there may be benefits later in dealing with controversial matters, especially in the case that other, especially P-5, members have not developed similar working relations. As the vote on the latest Iran resolution showed, Vietnam will stake out its own position on an issue, but is also willing to be flexible, and even disappoint a "friend," provided that it feels its views are acknowledged.  
MICHALAK